

## HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 821

By Miller L

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend Ben Cauley of Memphis for his outstanding musical career.

WHEREAS, Tennessee proudly possesses an incomparable musical heritage from Memphis to Mountain City, many of her gifted sons and daughters have won national and international acclaim as legendary musicians, songwriters, and performers; and

WHEREAS, one such individual is Ben Cauley of Memphis, the original trumpet player for the legendary Memphis group, The Bar-Kays, who produced some of the funkier soul music ever played by a native Memphis band, an accolade that speaks volumes about both their creative talent and musicianship; and

WHEREAS, a native of Memphis born in 1947, Ben Cauley's musical training started as a child at the New Friendship Baptist Church where he and his mother sang in the choir; and

WHEREAS, picking up a trumpet for the first time in seventh grade, young Ben was soon playing music with other youths in his South Memphis neighborhood. They formed a group they first called the Imperials that would soon become The Bar-Kays; and

WHEREAS, changing the group name in 1966, The Bar-Kays were originally composed of guitarist Jimmy King, saxophonist Phalon Jones, drummer Carl Cunningham, keyboardist Ronnie Caldwell, and bassist James Alexander along with Mr. Cauley on trumpet; and

WHEREAS, many of The Bar-Kays were younger than Mr. Cauley, who attended Lemoyne College, and were students at Booker T. Washington High School; the mostly underage band became a favorite at late-night clubs like the Hippodrome, adding their flashy step and dance moves into a repertoire of rhythm and blues songs; and

WHEREAS, in the spring of 1967, the group released their debut single "Soul Finger" on legendary Stax Records, featuring Mr. Cauley's great trumpet playing. The song, destined to

become an R&B classic, hit No. 3 on the Billboard R&B charts and quickly launched the young Bar-Kays as a hit act, following in the footsteps of Stax label mates, Booker T. & the MGs; and

WHEREAS, catching the Bar-Kays in concert, the great Otis Redding, Stax's signature star, was taken by their sound and asked them to join him on tour, taking care of their travel arrangements by providing his plane to pick them up on Fridays at the end of the school week so they could perform with him on weekends; and

WHEREAS, after performing a 10-night stand at the famous Apollo Theatre in Harlem during the summer of 1967, the Bar-Kays and Otis Redding proved to be a perfect musical fit and were deemed "a match made in heaven" by Mr. Ben Cauley; and

WHEREAS, after a short pause from the road, during which time Otis Redding wrote and recorded his swan song, "(Sittin' on the) Dock of the Bay," the tour resumed with the musical acts playing weekend shows at colleges around the nation with the band and entourage traveling on Redding's new twin engine Beechcraft; and

WHEREAS, with three shows booked for the weekend of December 8-10, 1967, the group flew to Cleveland, Ohio, after a performance in Nashville at Vanderbilt University, and appeared on the television program, "Upbeat," and then played a concert; and

WHEREAS, rising early the next morning to fly to Madison, Wisconsin, the group members boarded the Beechcraft with Otis Redding for the fateful flight that would end in tragedy as the plane later crashed in Lake Monona just outside of Madison, killing everyone on board except Mr. Cauley; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Cauley's survival was nothing short of miraculous, as he was separated from the plane and thrown out of an opening in the fuselage into the frigidly cold water of Lake Monona. Never having learned to swim, he struggled in the water, buoyed by a seat cushion in the cold chaos and confusion of the wreckage; and

WHEREAS, the swift arrival of the local emergency rescue team was possibly the thing that saved his life, pulling him from the waters just minutes away from hypothermia with relatively minor cuts on his head and foot; and

WHEREAS, Bar-Kay bassist James Alexander missed the fatal flight, having volunteered to return the band's rental car in Cleveland and hop a commercial flight to Wisconsin after dropping his bandmates off at the hangar that morning; and

WHEREAS, after months of recovery and mourning, James Alexander and Ben Cauley reformed the band, with the new Bar-Kays debuting in 1968 and achieving success, recording and playing sessions at Stax and touring with such groups as the Temptations; and

WHEREAS, Ben Cauley would leave the group in 1972 to attend to his growing family and spend more time at home while continuing to share his musical talent as a much-in-demand session player in Memphis, Muscle Shoals, and Nashville; and

WHEREAS, 1989 would see yet another near-tragedy for Mr. Cauley as he suffered an aneurysm and massive stroke, resulting in his medical caregivers saying he had three days to live; and

WHEREAS, proving the doctors wrong, on the third day Ben Cauley recovered dramatically enough to leave the intensive care unit. Undergoing total rehabilitation, he learned to read, write, walk, dress himself, and feed himself; and

WHEREAS, once again defying the medical professionals who told him he'd never play the trumpet again, Ben Cauley's first day home after months of rehab saw him pick up the object he found on the couch, not knowing what it was, and playing the opening first notes of "Soul Finger"; and

WHEREAS, still seeking to perform after his rehab, Mr. Cauley got a gig through his friend David Porter as a kind of one-man band at Porter's Da' Blues restaurant inside the Memphis International Airport. The popularity of his performances would be the spark that would kindle the idea that culminated in the makeover of the airport around the music of Memphis; and

WHEREAS, a revered figure in the Memphis music community, Mr. Cauley has become an important presence at the Stax Museum of American Soul, both at ceremonial functions and its school for children; and

WHEREAS, 2007 was a milestone year in the life of Ben Cauley as he celebrated his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, observed the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Stax Records, and sadly

commemorated the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that fateful day in Wisconsin by returning to the site for the first time; and

WHEREAS, in front of a crowd of hundreds, Mr. Cauley paid a deeply moving musical tribute to his departed friends at a club on the banks of Lake Monona, with the experience bringing to him some measure of peace; and

WHEREAS, a true survivor, Ben Cauley is the loving father of seven devoted children, and a beloved icon in the Memphis community; and

WHEREAS, it is highly appropriate that we honor the talented musician, the courageous survivor, the loving father, and the exemplary human being that is Ben Cauley; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor Ben Cauley of Memphis for his outstanding musical contributions to the State of Tennessee, commend him for living his life with courage and conviction, and extend to him our best wishes for much success in all his future endeavors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.